

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 NEA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07

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TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, UK, PINT

SUBJECT: CONCLUSION OF INTERNATIONAL AUTOMOBILE WORKERS
CONFERENCE

1. BEGIN SUMMARY - THE INTERNATIONAL AUTOMOBILE WORKERS
CONFERENCE CONCLUDED YESTERDAY (DECEMBER 11), SPENT THREE
DAYS OF DILIGENTLY PLODDING THROUGH THE TURGID PROSE OF
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND SPECIAL COUNTRY STUDIES ON INDUS-
TRIAL POLLUTION, SAFETY OF WORKERS, DEHUMANIZATION OF
WORK AND RELATED ISSUES -- INTERLARDED WITH ATTACKS ON
CAPITALISM AND THE MULTINATIONALS -- MOSTLY AMERICAN.
WHILE -- FOR THE MOST PART -- SPEAKERS APPEARED TO AVOID
BROAD INFLAMMATORY POLITICAL STATEMENTS, THE FINAL DECLARATION AND SOME OF THE STUDIES CONTAINED THEIR SHARE OF
THEM. A CENTRAL ISSUE NOW IS WHAT EFFECT WILL THIS CONFERENCE HAVE ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF THE INTERNATIONAL
TRADE UNION MOVEMENT (LONDON 16152). END SUMMARY

2. AFTER MEETING IN THREE STUDY GROUPS --ON EACH OF
WHICH SOME BRITISH AND EASTERN EUROPEAN TRADE UNIONISTS
WERE REPRESENTED -- THE CONFERENCE UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED
A DECLARATION WHICH INTER ALIA CALLED ON UNIONS TO SEEK
SHORTER WORKING HOURS WITHOUT LOSS OF PAY, RETRAINING
PROGRAMS AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WHICH WOULD PROVIDE WORKERS WITH SYSTEMATIC JOB ALTERNATIVES AND WORK
CHANGES, AS WELL AS THE RIGHT TO INTERVENE IN TECHNOLOGICAL DECISIONS INCLUDING CONTROL OF "LABOR INTENSITY AND
LINE SPEED." THE DECLARATION ALSO STATED THAT UNIONS
SHOULD EXERCISE CONTROL OVER THE WORK PLACE AND THE
INDUSTRIAL ENVIRONMENT, PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH AND
PLANNING PROJECTS INVOLVING PSYCHO-PHYSICAL PROBLEMS OF
THE WORK PLACE, SEEK PROTECTION IN WORKER TRANSFERS IN
ORDER TO INSURE CONTINUATION OF THEIR REGULAR INCOME,
RETRAINING AND A GUARANTEE OF RE-EMPLOYMENT. SPECIAL
ATTENTION, IT ADDED, SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO THE NEEDS OF
MIGRANT WORKERS.

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3. WHILE A NUMBER OF THESE SUGGESTIONS COULD BE ACCEPTED
-- AT LEAST IN PART -- BY WORKERS IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES
THERE WERE SECTIONS OF THE STATEMENT WHICH CLEARLY REFLECTED THE DRAFTING HAND OF SOME OF THE COMMUNIST DELEGATES, PARTICULARLY IN THE INVIDIOUS COMPARISONS BETWEEN
"CAPITALIST" AND "SOCIALIST" COUNTRIES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE
DECLARATION STATED THAT "THE COMPOUNDING OF GROWING
ECONOMIC CRISIS, MASS DISMISSALS AND UNEMPLOYMENT WITH

THE PROBLEMS OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND CORPORATE RE-STRUCTURING IN THE CAPITALIST WORLD, TOGETHER WITH THE RAPID INCREASE IN INFLUENCE OF THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS, CREATES AN EVEN GREATER URGENCY." IT THEN GOES ON TO EMPHASIZE: "IN THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES ... THE TRADE UNIONS HAVE CONSIDERABLE RIGHTS AND POWERS WITH THE FORCE OF LAW IN THESE MATTERS ... "

4. SIMILARLY, THE SPECIAL REPORTS FROM VARIOUS AREAS HAD A NUMBER OF THESE AND OTHER FORMS OF INVIDIOUS COMPARISON BETWEEN THE "CAPITALIST" AND "SOCIALIST" COUNTRIES. (BOTH THE DECLARATION AND THE REPORTS ARE BEING POUCHED). IF ONE WERE TO ACCEPT THESE REPORTS AS AUTHENTIC DESCRIPTIONS OF THE HUMAN CONDITION, HE WOULD HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT SOME MYSTERIOUS ANTI-POLLUTION OR ANTI-DEHUMANIZATION CURTAIN SEPARATED EASTERN EUROPE FROM WESTERN EUROPE AND PERHAPS THE CHINESE PEOPLES REPUBLIC AS WELL (SINCE OF COURSE, NONE OF CPR REPRESENTATIVES WAS PRESENT.) IN A JOINT PAPER BY THE POLISH, AUSTRALIAN AND JAPANESE UNIONS, THERE IS A DRAMATIC DESCRIPTION OF THE AIR POLLU-

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TION IN NEW YORK CITY AND OTHER PARTS OF NORTH AMERICA, FOLLOWED BY SEVERAL PAGES - THE BULK OF THE REPORT - OF HOW POLAND AND THE SOVIET UNION ARE COPING -- OBVIOUSLY VERY SUCCESSFULLY -- WITH THEIR PROBLEMS. OTHER PAPERS, SUCH AS THE JOINT GDR-FRANCE WERE MORE EXPLICIT IN THEIR ATTACKS ON THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM WHICH IT DESCRIBES AS HAVING "ENTERED A STAGE WHERE SOME BIG MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS HAVE SPREAD THEIR TENTACLES OVER EVERY CORNER OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY.")

5. NONETHELESS, CONFERENCE SPONSORS SUCH AS L.W. BUCK, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TUC SHEETMETAL WORKERS, EXPRESSED GREAT SATISFACTION AT THE OUTCOME OF THE CONFERENCE WHICH WAS DESCRIBED AS A PIONEERING EFFORT. THE FINAL DECLARATION ITSELF EMPHASIZED: "THE PARTICIPANTS OF THIS SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE CONSIDER IT NECESSARY TO CONTINUE INITIATIVES OF THIS KIND AROUND SPECIFIC PROBLEMS AND PROGRAMS ... " IT ALSO "EXPRESSES STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFERENCE ON HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT, UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR OFFICE IN GENEVA, DURING FEBRUARY 1975."

6. COMMENT: NOT ALL BRITISH TRADE UNIONISTS SHARE THE EUPHORIA OF BUCK AND SOME OF HIS FELLOW PARTICIPANTS. THERE WAS, IN FACT, A CONSIDERABLE SENSE OF DISAPPOINTMENT EXPRESSED TO US IN PRIVATE BY SOME BRITISH TRADE UNIONISTS ABOUT THE CONFERENCE -- PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO NOTED THE MASSIVE NON-PARTICIPATION OF THE AMERICANS, THE GERMANS, THE SWEDISH, THE BELGIANS AND OTHER LEADING METALWORKER UNIONS. WE HAVE ALREADY DESCRIBED THE CASUAL APOLOGIA OF JACK JONES (REFTEL), AND ONE OF THE OFFICIALS OF THE GIANT GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL WORKERS UNION (WHICH SENT A DELEGATION TO THE CONFERENCE) TOLD US THAT THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE DEBATE WITHIN THE GMWU ABOUT ITS DECISION TO PARTICIPATE.

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7. THE EFFECT OF THE HOLDING OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL METALWORKERS FEDERATION AND ON OTHER INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION BODIES REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT THERE IS NO DOUBT IT WILL BE DIVISIVE. (WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT THE TUC HEADQUARTERS FOLLOWED A GENERAL HANDS-OFF POLICY WITH REGARD TO THE CONFERENCE -- EXCEPT FOR GENERAL SECRETARY LEN MURRAY'S OPENING "BLESSING" (REFTEL) -- THERE WERE TEN OF ITS AFFILIATES IN ATTENDANCE, REPRESENTING 40 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL MEMBERSHIP.) IT SHOULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT A COMMITTEE OF INITIATIVE (INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF BRITAIN, FRANCE, ITALY, POLAND, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, THE SOVIET UNION, FINLAND, JAPAN AND THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC) WILL CONTINUE TO OPERATE FOR FUTURE LIAISON, INCLUDING OTHER CONFERENCES.

8. THE THEME OF THE CONFERENCE -- WORKING CONDITIONS AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE AUTOMOBILE AND ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES -- IS CLEARLY A SERIOUS ONE WHICH CONCERNS WORKERS EVERYWHERE. BUT FOR MANY OBSERVERS, THE FORUM CHOSEN TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE IS UNLIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE TO ANY MEANINGFUL INTERNATIONAL SOLUTION. FOR THE COMMUNISTS, THE CONFERENCE WAS A POLITICAL SUCCESS FOR WHICH THEY PAID A VERY SMALL PRICE -- THEIR PASSAGE TO AND FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM. FOR THEM, THE PROBLEMS BEING DISCUSSED WERE CAUSED BY THE DEFECTS OF CAPITALISM AND COULD ONLY BE SOLVED BY MARXIST APPROACHES -- AND THE NON-COMMUNISTS PRESENT WERE ILL-PREPARED OR PERHAPS UNWILLING TO TAKE ISSUE WITH THEM.

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